

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 278418

EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR YOUNG FROM UNA

FOLLOWING REPEAT HAVANA 643 ACTION SECSTATE NOV 19

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 0643

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI MARR XJ CU AO ET SO PINS
SUBJ: GOC REACTION TO USG STATEMENTS ON CUBAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA

REF: HAVACA 471

1.SUMMARY: SENIOR CUBAN FOREIGN POLICY ADVISER EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER LATEST USG STATEMENTNES ON AFRICA, CLAIMS CUBA IS NOT INVOLVED IN ETHIOPIA COMBAT, AND ASSERTS THAT CUBA HAS NOT INCREASED ANGOLA FORCES SINCE SPRING. HE SUGGESTS THAT SECURITY THREAT TO ANGOLA COULD BE ALLEVIATED, AND NAMIBIA SOLUTION FACILITATED, BY PARALLEL WITHDRAWALS AND NON-INVASION PLEDGES ON NAMIBIA BORDER. FRENCH ASSURANCES CONCERNING THREAT FROM SZIRE WILL ALSO HELP.
END SUMMARY.

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2. COUNCIL OF STATE AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS VICE PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISER TO CASTRO, INVITED ME TO HIS OFFICE AT 7:00 P.M. FRIDAY NIGHT NOVEMBER 18, TO DISCUSS THE RECENT STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT CARTER AND OTHER HIGH-LEVEL USG SPOKESMEN CONCERNING THE CUBAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA AND ITS EFFECT ON U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS. IT SEEMED CLEAR THAT RODRIGUEZ WAS RELYING PRIMARILY ON WIRE SERVICE AND NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS AND NOT ON REPORTING FROM CUBAN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES IN THE U.S.

3. RODRIGUEZ STATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE WAS SPEAKING TO ME ON

BEHALF OF PRESIDENT CASTRO, AND THAT HE WAS GIVING ME THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT. FMR MY PART, I EMPHASIZED THAT I HAD RECEIVED AS YET NO NEW INSTRUCTIONS OR OTHER EXPLICATION OF THE U.S.G. VIEWS AND DATA RELEASED THIS WEEK, BUT WOULD BE SPEAKING TO HIM ON THE BASIS OF MY PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF OUR CONCERNS.

4. RODRIGUEZ BEGAN BY SAYING THAT CUBA HIGHLY VALUES THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION WHICH HAS BEGUN AND IS VERY DESIROUS OF CONTINUING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. IT IS THEREFORE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS WEEK'S REPORTS OF U.S. VIEWS, AND ABOUT A SEEMINGLY WIDESPREAD CAMPAIGN IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES WHICH MISREPRESENTS THE CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA. HE WONDERED WHETHER THE U.S.G. DECLARATIONS WERE RESPONSIVE PRIMARILY TO INTERNAL POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS IN THE U.S., OR WHSTHER THEY REFLECTED SERIOUS MINCONCEPTIONS AND MISINFORMATION ABOUT THE FACTS. IN THE LATTER CASE, THE GOC WOULD LIKE TO TRY TO CLEAR UP ANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS. I REPLIED THAT U.S.G. CONCERNS ABOUT THE CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA GO BACK A LONG TIME ANDIARE WELL KNOWN; THEY CERTAINLY DO NOT REST ON PASSING DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. MOREOVER, I EMPHASIZED, THE PROXIMATE OCCASION FOR THE LATEST EXPRESSIONS OF CONERN IN WASHINGTON WAS AN OFFICIAL U.S.G. STUDY WHICH INDICATED A VERY LARGE AND GROWING CUBAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFRICA WHICH IN THE VIEW OF THE U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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AND OTHER COUNTRIES IS NOT HELPFUL TO PEACEFUL SETTLEMENTS OF PROBLEMS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE THERE. I SAID THAT IF THIS INFORMATION WAS INCOMPLETE OR INCORRECT, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL IF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT COULD GIVE US A MORE ACCURATE PICTURE OF ITS PRESENCE AND INTENTIONS IN AFRICA.

5. TO THIS DR. RODRIGUEZ RESPONDED FORCEFULLY THAT THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT WANTS THE USG TO KNOW THAT IT IS NOT ACTING, AND DOES NOT WANT TO ACT, IN AFRICA IN ANY WAY HARMFUL TO U.S. INTERESTS THERE. CUBA IS NOT FOMENTING SUBVERSION OR SEEKING TO DESTABLIZE THE SITUATION IN AFRICA. IT DOES INTEND TO HELP ITS FRIENDS TO DEVELOP AND TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. AS SOON AS THE SITUATION PERMITS, CUBA WANTS TO DECREASE ITS MILITARY FORCES IN AFRICA IN FAVOR OF CIVILIAN TECHNICIANS, AND IN FACT, DESPITE THE ALLEGATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, IT HAS NOT BEEN GREATLY INCREASING ITS MILITARY PRESENCE RECENTLY EVEN THOUGH IT HAS HAD URGENT REQUESTS TO DO SO. TURNING TO A WIRE SERVICE DISPATCH RODRIGUEZ THEN SAID THAT THE NEW YORK TIMES PIECE OF NOVEMBER 17 WAS GREATLY EXAGGERATED AND INACCURATE IN MANY WAYS. IF IT REFLECTED THE USG STUDY CORRECTLY, THE UNITED STATES WAS SERIOUSLY MISINFORMED. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAID, THERE ARE ONLY EIGHT CUBAN POLICE ADVISERS IN SIERRA LEONE AND NO REPEAT NO CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL OF ANY DESCRIPTION IN LIGYA, MADAGASCAR AND UGANDA. THE FIGURES GIVEN BY THE TIMES OF GUINEA-BISSAU ARE ALSO EXAGGERATED AS ARE MANY OTHERS.

6. WE THEN TURNED TO THE ETHIOPIAN SITUATION, AND I ASKED WHETHER THE FIGURES PUBLISHED ON THE CUBAN PRESENCE AND BUILDUP THERE WERE

ACCURATE. RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE MILITARY FIGURE (400) WAS SOMEWHAT HIGH, ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT CONFIRM THAT; HE DID KNOW FOR A FACT THAT THE ACTUAL FIGURE FOR CIVILIAN ADVISERS WAS HIGHER THAN THAT MENTIONED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN (270 VERSUS 150). IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION HE THEN STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT THERE ARE NO REPEAT NO CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL OF ANY KIND NEAR THE FRONT IN OGADEN WHETHER IN COMBAT, TRAINING, EQUIPMENT HANDLING OR ANY OTHER ACTIVITY, AND THAT CUBA HAS NO INTENTION OF JOINING THE FIGHTING THERE. HE
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ADMITTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT INCREASES OF CUBAN MILITARY ADVISERS IN ETHIOPIA (SINCE THE OGADEN CRISIS ESCALATED) PURSUANT TO PRIOR COMMITMENTS, BUT INSISTED THAT THEY ARE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY ENGAGED ONLY IN TRAINING THE POORLY ORGANIZED ETHIOPIAN ARMY (NOT IN HANDLING EQUIPMENT OR IN A COMBAT ROLE). HE ALSO STATED THAT CUBA HAS NO PLANS TO INCREASE ITS MILITARY PRESENCE SIGNIFICANTLY, AND SAID THAT ETHIOPIA DOES NOT NEED FOREIGN MILITARY MANPOWER. WHEN I ASKED WHAT CUBA COULD DO TO HELP PROMOTE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENTS IN ETHIOPIA, RODRIGUEZ REPLIED THAT THE GOC HAS MADE STRENUOUS EFFORTS TO DO SO BOTH WITH RESPECT TO ERITREA AND THE OGADEN. HE THOUGHT THE PROSPECTS FOR A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE FIRST PROBLEM ARE GOOD, BUT HE IS NOT HOPEFUL ABOUT OGADEN GIVEN SOMALIA'S AGGRESSIVE POSTURE, FURTHERMORE, HE DOUBTS THAT CUBA ANY LONGER HAS ANY INFLUENCE WITH SOMALIA. (HE REFUSED TO CONFIRM OR DENY THAT MENGISTU HAS VISITED CUBA RECENTLY BUT SAID THAT COMMUNICATIONS WITH HIM ARE EXCELLENT.)

7. TURNING NEXT TO SOUTHERN AFRICA, DR. RODRIGUEZ REFUSED TO CONFIRM, BUT WOULD NOT DENY THE PUBLISHED REPORTS OF SOME 20,000 CUBAN TROOPS IN ANGOLA. RATHER, HE ARGUED THAT THE PRESENT MILITARY STRENGTH IS SIGNIFICANTLY LESS (AS MUCH AS HALF HE SAID), THAN IT WAS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE ANGOLAN WAR. (IN THIS RESPECT, HE SAID, USG ESTIMATES AT THE TIME SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERESTIMATED THE CUBAN PRESENCE) WHEN I SUGGESTED A MAXIMUM 40,000 FIGURE, HE SAID THAT WAS HIGH) HE CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT THERE HAS BEEN ANY SIGNIFICANT CUBAN MILITARY BUILDUP AFTER LAST APRIL OR MAY, WHEN THE PROCESS OF WITHDRAWAL FROM ANGOLA WAS STOPPED AND SOME REINFORCEMENTS WERE SENT AT THE TIME OF THE SHAO INCIDENT. IN ANGOLA AS ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, RODRIGUEZ DECLARED, THE CUBAN OBJECTIVE IS TO REDUCE ITS MILITARY ROLE AND TO ACCENT ITS CIVILIAN TECHNICAL COLLABORATION. THE PROBLEM IS TO PREPARE ANGOLAN FORCES TO DEFEND THE COUNTRY IN THE FACE OF THE THREAT FROM SOUTH AFRICA. HE ALSO MADE REFERENCE TO RHODESIAN THREAT TO ITS
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NEIGHBORS IN THIS CONTEXT. PROGRESS IN PEACEFUL REDUCTION OF THOSE THREATS, HE SAID, WOULD PERMIT A RESUMPTION OF CUBAN WITHDRAWALS. ON THESE SITUATIONS HE HAD THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

A. NAMIBIA. THE GOC IS AWARE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION AND TO ACHIEVE A SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM FORWARD POSITIONS WITH A POSSIBLE UNITED NATIONS PRESENCE NEAR THE BORDERS. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE CONCERNED PARTIES, INCLUDING THE CUBANS., APPROACH THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT DIRECTLY TO RELAY SOUTH AFRICAN ASSURANCES THAT IT WILL NOT INVADE ANGOLA. WHILE HE COULD NOT SPEAK FOR ANGOLA: HE SAID, HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT IT WOULD BE WILLING TO RESPOND TO SUCH ASSURANCES IN A CONSTRUCTIVE MANNER INCLUDING THE WITHDRAWAL OF ITS OWN FORCES FROM THE BORDER AREA. CUBA WOULD SUPPORT AND JOIN IN SUCH A WITHDRAWAL.

B. ZIMBABWE. THE GOC RELUCTANTLY BELIEVES THAT THERE IS NO SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM EXCEPT A MILITARY ONE DUE TO SMITH'S INTRANSIGENCE. NEVERTHELESS, WHEN MACHEL INDICATED DURING THIS RECENT VISIT TO CUBA THAT HE WOULD SUPPORT THE FRONT LINE STATES' EFFORT TO FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. THE GOC FULLY SUPPORTED THAT POSITION.

C. ZAIRE. ACCORDING TO RODRIGUEZ, A SENIOR FRENCH OFFICIAL WILL VISIT CUBA ON NOVEMBER 30 TO DISCUSS FRENCH POLICIES IN AFRICA (WHICH CUBA BELIEVES ARE SUSPECT) INCLUDING ZAIRE. ADEQUATE FRENCH ASSURANCES CONCERNING THE THREAT FROM ZAIRE WOULD HELP REDUCE TENSIONS IN THAT REGION. (FYI: CUBAN NOVEMBER 10 STATEMENT ON FRENCH ROLE IN SAHARA ALSO CONDEMNS ROLE OF FRENCH INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN SUPERVISING INCURSIONS FROM ZAIRE INTO CABINDA. SEE HAVANA 577).

8. REFERRING AGAIN TO THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN SITUATION IN GENERAL, DR RODRIGUEZ DECLARED THAT CUBA WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY ARMED ATTACK ACROSS ANGOLA'S BORDERS. ANY ATTACK BY OTHERS INTO ANGOLA WOULD BE A DIFFERENT STORY, HOWEVER.

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9. WITH RESPECT TO THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IN ANGOLA, RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT NEITHER THE MPLA NOR CUBA SAW ANY PROSPECT FOR A RECONCILIATION WITH THE FNLA OR UNITA. MOREOVER, DRAWING AN ANALOGY FROM THE CUBAN REVOLUTION, HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE MPLA WAS GETTING STRONGER ALL THE TIME AND WOULD EVENTUALLY ACHIEVE COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

10. COMMENT. WHILE INDICATING THAT IN NO WAY WOULD THE GOC NEGOTIATE WITH THE U.S. OVER ITS ROLE AND PRESENCE IN AFRICA, DR. RODRIGUEZ CLEARLY REVEALED CUBA'S PREOCCUPATION WITH U.S. VIEW AND THEIR POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS. HE INDICATED THAT CUBA WISHES TO CORRECT ANY REAL US "MISCONCEPTIONS" ABOUT CUBA'S POSITION AND INTENTIONS IN AFRICA, ALTHOUGH HE WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT PREPARED TO BE MORE SPECIFIC ABOUT TROOP STRENGTHS, I SAID THAT I THOUGHT THAT THIS CONVERSATION AND A FUTURE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUE THIS DIALOGUE COULD BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL AND ASKED HOW I SHOULD PROCEED IF THERE WERE FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS OR QUESTIONS FROM WASHINGTON. RODRIGUEZ

REPLIED THAT ON THIS SUBJECT ONLY RPT ONLY HE WOULD BE DIRECTLY AVAILABLE TO ME (AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO MY FORMER LINE OF COMMUNICATION AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY). IF THE DEPARTMENT HAS FURTHER COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS WHICH MIGHT USEFULLY BE PUT TO HIM IN THE INTERESTS OF EXPLOITING THIS OPPORTUNITY (AND PERHAPS OPENING UP THIS IMPORTANT AVENUE OF COMMUNICATIONS) I WOULD WELCOME THE APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONS. IN ANY CASE, I WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING COMMENTS ON RODRIGUEZ' STATEMENTS. THE DEPARTMENT'S VIEWS ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA, AND SPECIFICALLY ON THE ROLE OF USINT IN THE TRAIN OF THIS WEEK'S STATEMENTS IN WASHINGTON. I WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE RECEIVING A COPY OF THE USG STUDY ON THE CUBAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA WHICH WAS APPARENTLY RELEASED TO THEPRESS. LANE. UNQUOTE HABIB

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